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## Van Howe, Kristi Oral History Interview: Tulip Time

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The Hope College Oral History Project for 1995  
The Joint Archives of Holland

Interview #4  
Mrs. Kristi Van Howe  
The Oral History of Tulip Time

Conducted by:  
Jason Valere Upchurch  
6, June 1995

The Oral History of Tulip Time  
Interview #4

- Interview with Kristi Van Howe @ The Hatch (restaurant)
- 151 Lakeview Avenue / Holland, MI 49424
- June 6, 1995
- Interviewer: Jason Valere Upchurch

**Begin Tape 3 : Side A**

JVU: I need you to repeat your name again, and that business.

KV: My name is Kristi Van Howe. I was born on

[date removed], 1945, and from 1986-1993 I served as the executive director of both the Tulip Time Festival and the Holland Convention and Visitor's Bureau.

When I came to the festival, just a couple of weeks before the festival in 1986, I just kind of walked through it. They wanted me to see it, because I don't think unless you see it you can really believe it. That following summer of 1986 was my opportunity to really dig into the festival and try and figure out what was making it tick, what made it work, and what we needed to do; what our biggest challenges were.

I have my own layman's interpretation of how the festival got that far in sixty years, and I think it's really important for everybody to understand that this festival evolved out of the basic nature of people in Holland, Michigan. I do not believe that they were trying to create a tourist event. This was a Civic beautification project. They did it for themselves, and I think it is the natural hospitality of these people that really made it blossom into one of the biggest events in the United States of America. I believe that when they planted the tulips and people from neighboring communities automatically came to see the tulips that the people in Holland said, 'We don't have enough restaurants for these people, these people are hungry. We better call the church ladies and the church ladies can cook up some meals for them.' So therefore developed a unique church group

meal program that still services the guests of the festival today. The church ladies cook up the meals, people on busses come and eat them. It's good value, it's home cooking, it's a great program.

Then I think the people in Holland said, 'These people don't have enough to do. They can only look at tulips so long, we better have a parade.' So they went to the local schools and said, 'Let's bring the kids down and have a parade.' Same thing with the Dutch dance program. 'We need some folk dancing, let's talk to the high school.' The important part of all those things--the natural hospitality of the festival--is that I truly believe that in 1995, you couldn't do this again. You could never do what happened naturally back then. But as the festival evolved over almost sixty years, some of those volunteer things had to be changed; we had to also be a professional festival. And when I came there in 1986 and dug into it that summer--walked in circles trying to figure out how these things had gotten where they were--we quickly discovered that the biggest need for the festival was financial stability. The festival is an all earned income festival, and it had been losing pretty big sums of money for several years. And although the intention of the festival is not to make money, we like to be very proud that we don't need to be funded by taxes, or by city government; that we can be an independent, not-for-profit organization.

So, the eight years after that were basically spent totally updating the marketing programs. Sometimes we had to spend more money to sell more, or to do it more professionally. We upgraded all our equipment. Where people were recording how many tickets they sold with little chicken scratches, we got computerized cash registers, and developed the accounting and bookkeeping systems we needed to know where we were. We also, it was not until 1986 to my knowledge, that anybody ever developed a formal budget for the festival, and when you budgeted it and found out how much those free events cost, how much money we were spending on broken wooden shoes, how much money we were spending

putting on parades, we felt a great need to develop a corporate sponsorship program where businesses--hopefully win/win kind of businesses; business that had something to gain, or who were proud of the festival, or proud of the fact that their home base was in Holland, Michigan and wanted to be involved. That corporate sponsorship program quickly became a key element of the financial security of the festival itself.

So we went from being way, way in the hole financially in 1986, to the next eight years, socking away a few hundred thousand dollars in the bank, believing that it was really important to the long-term future of the festival, that we needed at least one year's cost--festival cost--in the bank for security. In the process of doing that, those eight years, the corporate sponsorship program was key, also we began presenting new events that would all serve as revenue centers for the festival. So we made major hurdles that eight years, and I think it will. In 1994, we're financially in great shape to continue and I hope that the color--the face of Tulip Time--did not change at all, that it still is that down-home, church-ladies-cooking-dinner, high school girls dancing in the streets. That's a real important part of the festival to just preserve.

JVU: That answered my second question already.

KV: What was the second question?

JVU: What areas of the festival have you attended or been involved with directly?

KV: One of the things that we added in those years, I think like in 1987, which is one of the major events of the festival right now, is the fireworks event, which is a salute to the volunteers. We really felt that the festival was appealing a lot to tourists, and the local people didn't get the recognition for all their contributions. So we wanted one event that was kind of cross generational, would appeal to both kids--because kids make this festival really work--would appeal to the church ladies, and you know, something that would appeal to everybody. It is now one of the festivals biggest events, and I hope it always will be. They

shoot fireworks off Kollen Park, off barges and have the largest performance of the Klompen dancers that night, both the alumni and the high school groups dance together, and I love that event, and I think it will probably be around for the next sixty years because it did work really, really well.

Other events that we started? We started doing a lot of dinner shows, a dinner show at the Holiday Inn. We contribute to their business viability as well as to the revenue of the festival. So we started about four or five dinner shows during those years, finding that those were extremely profitable, low-risk, new events. We started "A Trip Through Time," which is a Joint Archives project where we have a slide show and audio visual show that's the Knickerbocker Theater. We started A Taste of Holland at Hope College, which is a Dutch history breakfast buffet. All the new events that we started, we tried to keep in keeping with the general tone of the festival itself, but make sure that they were wise moves from the business perspective also.

Probably also real significantly during that eight years, the festival was extended from being a four day festival to being a ten day festival, so that it could go over two weekends. We also started doing boat cruises out on Lake Macatawa, scenic cruises. We started the Tulip Trolleys, which is guided tour through the tulip lanes. Tulip Trolley started out with the Hope Academy of Senior Professionals, HASP, and they already had so much historical information about Holland, and so we put them on the Tulip Trolley, and they gave guided tours, and they already had so much at their disposal because they were retired judges and school teachers, and they all loved history. So they could ride around to the tulip lanes, and be very entertaining to our guests. The boat cruises were the ones where we brought in the Holland High School forensic students, and they became the guides on the boat cruises--at least for one year.

So I would say during those eight years, we probably like almost doubled the events and the services that we were

offering through the festival. But they were all built on their own separate budget, and their own separate cash flow position, and it worked out really well.

JVU: Well, that's a question later, so you can have time to think about it.

KV: You know, another real significant thing about the festival during that eight years, is the festival had had a poster for years, but it wasn't very recognized. It was a small printing and not too many people saw it. During that eight years we changed so the poster was the first introduction of that year's festival, and became the logo of that festival. So once we consigned with an artist to create the poster, then we used portions of the poster to be the cover of all of our marketing materials; our order books, our advanced materials, our brochures, and then they became sweat shirts, tee shirts, coffee mugs, and that also created another revenue [center] for the festival.

JVU: I was wondering, besides these changes that you're talking about here from the business side of things, on the other side of the coin could you describe any changes for me that you've seen in the festival on a social level? In the people who volunteer or come to visit? That sort of thing.

KV: Oh, the most exciting thing that I saw during the time that I was there, is we really believed that instead of paying somebody who wanted a minimum wage job, instead of paying them \$4.25 an hour, we made relationships and associations with charitable causes. Once again, went back to the churches and the schools and the organizations that were trying to raise money to send their kids to the rain forest, and we made all the manpower needs of the festival, be through organizations like that. You know the information gazebos that are down town? They are staffed by volunteers, and instead of paying them as individuals, they are earning money in honorarium for their organization.

The same thing is true for the bleacher patrol. The bleacher patrol people are no longer young kids who just want to



make some money, they are the rain forest kids or their parents, and that gives people a different incentive for doing it. It's a loftier cause that sort of colors the festival and creates the tone of the festival, and goes back to the origins of the festival itself. So right now, almost everybody who's on the streets and working for the festival is working for an organization or a cause that they believe in.

JVU: So you see those changes as a return to the community maybe? Like the festival was in the beginning?

KV: Absolutely. The things that the festival is going to have to watch for in the future, is that . . . for example, the Klompen dance program which is a girl's high school program--it's not just girls, but it still is about 95% girls--you know, there's a lot of competition for their time now. Back when it started, that's all there was. Now there's girl's track and girl's tennis, and girl's cross country, and girl's basketball, so we're competing for those girls' time and energy and commitment, and that's going to be tricky but so far it's still working; there's a real pride about . . . it's unique and therefore the girls still sign up, and still do it.

JVU: That's my next question actually. Do you think . . . you'll have to kind of infer, this goes all the way back to the beginning. Do you think that Dutch pride has affected Tulip Time, or do you think that Tulip Time has brought on a rise in Dutch pride?

KV: What an interesting question. That really is an interesting question because it could go either way. I mean one of the reasons the "Dutchness" of this community lives on is certainly because of Tulip Time. I mean, where do you go to a High School football game, and everybody is yelling 'Go Dutch!' And the stands are filled with Asian kids, and Oriental kids, and Hispanic kids, and everybody's yelling 'Go Dutch!' I think that goes back to . . . I think that what keeps that alive is the festival. It's put Holland, Michigan on the map.

I'm so glad that the new cultural diversity, that these



high school students still choose to come out for this, even though it is [Dutch]. Before I came to the festival, the festival didn't have a mission statement, not a written down mission statement, and during the time I was there, the board of directors developed one. I don't know if I can do it verbatim, but . . . 'The Tulip Time Festival celebrates the annual blooming of the tulips, the Dutch heritage of our town, and the quality of life that we know here.' That's the essence of the mission statement. And I think it's real important that the mission statement said 'the Dutch heritage of this town.' So, it is people trying to keep alive their origins. Whether or not you're Dutch, or I'm Dutch, this town was founded by Dutch, and it's cool to keep that awareness. But if you're too pushy with it, you can actually turn people off with it too. I mean if we don't find room, and we have so far, for the new cultural diversity to become part of the festival, then it could be dangerous. But my observation during my eight years was not you know--like some of the people you're going to be talking to--are very, very Dutch and know more than those of us who are putting on the festival even dreamt of. We just need to rely on that. That's why it's good you're doing this project, because if we don't rely on it verbally, we will lose it.

JVU: What changes have you noticed with the coming of ethnic diversity to Holland, what changes have you noticed that has brought on in the festival, if any?

KV: Well it's still so new, that it's just exactly what I just said. You do have Hispanic kids, and Asian kids all out there doing Klompen dancing, and it's a beautiful blending. In a way it seems, to me, sort of a celebration of our likeness or our sameness instead of our diversity, and as I said, as long as we don't shove it down people's throats--for lack of a better way of saying that--it could be real harmonious. If we could make our new culturally diverse community proud of the roots of its town, not saying that Dutch is better than other cultures, but if we can create a community pride that, yeah . . . these people came

and settled this town, and that's why it's a great place to live, and therefore we all ought to celebrate that.

So you know, the national media loves to come into town now, and go to the parades and go to the Klompen dancers, and look at all the different faces and colors of what is going on here in Dutch costumes. That's unique. Where else do you get that? But it's precarious and precious.

JVU: I think along the same lines, I'll ask this question. For such a conservative community as Holland, Michigan is, and the whole area of Western Michigan, Tulip Time is a very liberal event I think, in the eyes of a lot of people.

KV: You think so?

JVU: Do you see that?

KV: Like how liberal?

JVU: As far as supporting the arts. I mean the ethnic diversity has grown and it's become part of the festival.

KV: Well, that's ironic that you're saying that, because I'm certainly not an expert on this, but I had the opportunity to meet with a lot of people like from the Netherlands' consulate, and they think that Holland, Michigan Dutch is very conservative. Very conservative because the Dutch people in the Netherlands aren't. They're very liberal. They . . . you know . . . I mean I guess we all know about what they do in the Netherlands, so they think we're kind of funny in our [conservatism]. And I think it is conservative too, in that we still have pretty old world, traditional events. I mean we certainly don't look like the Derby Festival, where there's a lot of beer tents.

JVU: Where is this?

KV: Louisville, Kentucky, the Kentucky Derby Festival. Or any other festivals. I had the opportunity to go representing the Tulip Time Festival to international organizations of festivals, and the Tulip Time Festival is one of the few festivals that does not fund itself on beer sales. I mean, and that's sort of a statement to me, and I don't think they ever will.

JVU: I don't think so either, but I think there are certain

aspects of the festival that are . . . that seem to be a little bit more liberal than . . .

KV: Like what though? Give me an example.

JVU: Perhaps it's not that the festival itself is liberal, but it brings out the liberal characteristics of Holland. Holland supports its youth, and its children's music programs. I see that as a very liberal program.

KV: See, I don't attach the word liberal to it. My connotations are not liberal, but I think it is so wonderful that . . . I am convinced that the reason, like our High School bands and our Junior High School bands are as big as they are, is because they know that in the spring, they will march and they will have a big audience that can see what they do. I believe that our kids get more involved like in the Tulip Time Salute and Tulip Time programs because, I mean you can take piano lessons all your life and go to a recital once a year where your mom and dad, grandma and grandpa come. Here, these kids get to perform to houses of two thousand people. That's very gratifying to them, so it brings out their talent, it brings out their willingness to commit the time to do it.

JVU: I'm going to move on to my next set of questions here, that are a little more personal I guess, as far as memories go about Tulip Time, and the first question is . . . What specific memories do you have of past Tulip Times that stand out to you as special, or just more memorable than others for one reason or another?

KV: Well the festival is just across the board, real special to me, in that I feel like we made a big contribution to bringing it into the Twentieth century when I was there, and because I value where it came from and what it is. Doing the marketing and the financial stability, and getting the festival in a position where it could move on and grow, and be self-sustaining was real important to me personally, and it's a great sense of pride to me that we could make those changes mostly without changing the tone. It's still an old world festival, and yet we kind of

modernized it. I can't point at any specific events, although I said I liked the fireworks, and I liked that because it is recognition of the volunteer spirit of the festival. It's amazing to me that year after year after year, people come out and they do their things, whether it's tuning pianos, or carving wooden shoes, or being an usher at a show, or being in a show, or marching in a band.

Other towns . . . I have worked in other communities and much bigger cities who would give anything to have a Tulip Time Festival. Because it does create civic pride, because it creates an incredible economic boost to the region. The festival fights for its own financial stability, but everybody else is making money. Probably everybody else is making a lot more money than the festival is. You know what I mean? The groups . . . almost every cause that we cherish, is making money during the festival. I mentioned a few of them; the rain forest kids, the churches, the schools, and the business community. Everybody is making money at the festival, and that is important. It's not the money, it's important to our quality of life. It's important that the church groups can raise money during the festival that will fund some of their missionary causes, or their youth programs. I think people would be really shocked if the festival went away, and that money wasn't in their coffers.

I value . . . I absolutely value the fact that at least up until 1993, we were able to take personal checks from people from all over the country, and we never had one bounce. I value the fact that people could put lawn chairs or something out on the parade route and they would not be stolen. I mean there's something about the festival that personifies the way the world should be, or the way we hope the world would be. [Which] was honest and sharing and community-oriented, and I just really hope we can preserve those things.

JVU: Do you want to say any more about that in light of the way Holland, Michigan has gotten some negative press in recent years for its . . . for the rising crime rate in Holland?

KV: Well that's just terrible. That's a particularly memorable thing for me because I was there as the executive director when that started coming out. There were people from UPI--United Press International--and Associated Press calling up and saying, 'So, you've got these gang things, and is that going to wreck the festival? Are tourists going to be afraid to come there?' And my only answer to them was, 'Not until you write this story.' I mean . . . because Holland has had almost zero crime, any crime seems big to us. But the things that as far as I'm concerned, that Holland was experiencing during my time there, was ethnically oriented, and I don't know a whole lot about gangs, but what I do know I got maybe from "West Side Story"--the book or the movie or something--and gangs don't target tourists, or they don't target or want to hurt kids in parades. Their competition is between each other. So I always thought the issue was overblown. We're living in the United States of America and it's 1995, and we are still very blessed with a very safe community. So I think that it's a shame when there's some overstatement. I'm not at all blinding myself to the fact that it's here, but we just have to learn to deal with it.

JVU: My next question is are there any specific people that you associate with Tulip Time? Not necessarily people who have helped you, but just names that if you think of Tulip Time . . .

KV: My thing with Tulip Time is . . . you know I can't go back far as what Jaap can, but during my time with the festival, there were two key people who died almost at the same time of Tulip Time, that I considered just key to the festival.

One of them was Betty Dick, who was a Dutch dance director for years. Jason, I've got such a bad memory, but memory is that Betty died just days after the festival ended. She made it through her last one. I don't remember that, but I do remember that our first fireworks event, we made that a salute to Betty Dick, and we surprised her with it. We had all the dancers dancing. For the first time the alumni and the high school dancers were all dancing together, and that's thousands of

them. The plan was, and they all knew it through the Dutch dance directors, that when they made their final bow, they would stay bowed and we would drive Betty Dick through the ranks of all the Klompen dancers, and it was a salute to her. It was probably one of my favorite moments in the festival, because it was kind of like General Patton, and the ranks saluting him, but she was so thrilled, and she deserved so much.

It isn't just what she did, but it was her attitude about how she did it that became contagious to all the other Dutch dance directors, and then all the other dancers. That's just wonderful, and I . . . you know, I still see Betty walking around in her Dutch costume, just checking on all those dancers, and making sure their uniforms are right. She had a high standard and it lives on.

The other one is Willard Wichers, who loved his Dutch ancestry, and was always . . . he was bringing special guests and ambassadors over from the Netherlands, and a Tulip is named for him, and he certainly was a big example to me. There are so many more. Jaap, I mean Jaap at Windmill Island for all those years.

[Workers enter. Brief discussion not related to topic]

KV: I don't know, it was so fun to be a part of it, to see what grew from individual people and spirits. But those are two that really stood out to me. Charles Conrad also. You know . . . the last year that he was alive, he helped me start the scenic boat tours of Lake Macatawa--the Wynkin', Blynkin' and Nod Cruises--and he loved Holland, and he loved the Dutch, and he had vision and eccentricities that were really important to the way it all comes together.

JVU: Anybody else?

KV: Naming any individual that played more of role than other people, is kind of dangerous, because it's only a team effort.

JVU: Okay. My next question is, what has Tulip Time meant to you personally? Not only through the years you were involved, but



even beyond.

KV: I think I have been, and probably always will be, one of the Tulip Time Festival's greatest cheer leaders, because I did grow up in this town and I moved away for twenty-five years, and I came back and ran the festival and I am aware, more than most can be, of the uniqueness of the festival.

In about 1988 or 89, I went to one of those conventions of all the festivals in the world. I mean it's an organization called International Festivals, and there were festivals from England and Australia and all over the place, and I'm there from Tulip Time. [And] That year, we won the award for the best promotional campaign f the year, of all the festivals in the world who were there. I went up to get this plaque, or whatever it was, and I hear, [claps] 'What's a Tulip Time?' It's not a Kentucky Derby Festival, but it is like this . . . I mean it works. I guess I'm such a big cheer leader for it, because I do not believe that you could reinvent it. The only way that it could live on, is to keep what's going, going.

JVU: How do you think that sets the festivals up for younger generations who are going to be . . .

KV: I think the kids are really important. If you get an overview of the festival, the festival is kids putting on a festival for older people. That's what it is right now, and as long as we make the kids feel good about that and respect their talent, and respect their efforts, then I think that every[one] loves a stage, and the festival gives the kids a stage. So I think it will keep going that way. Young talent.

JVU: I have a question down here. What direction do you see Tulip Time heading in? I guess you begin to touch on that. What else do you have to say about that? Will it change for the changing generations?

KV: You know what? I don't know, I'm no longer a part of it. I mean I had ideas when I was there but I've gone for about a year and a half now, and I really don't know where they're going with it. I think their challenges are enormous. Just enormous. I



think it's very delicate, and I hope . . . and I just hope that they have a handle on it. Well, exactly what you're saying . . . the kid's involvement, and there has to be a spirit about it. There has to be the Betty Dicks of the world that believe in it, and make that feeling contagious to younger people who keep the discipline in it. And like we've talked about a lot, the ethnic diversity, finding ways to harmoniously integrate all that. To say nothing, I will never ever take for granted the financial stability of the festival. It is one of the trickiest businesses I have ever seen. I mean basically the festival has to earn like twenty-five cents on a dollar. The rest of the money goes to pay for it, and then to the community. Can't help you out much with that one, Jason, except to say that I know it's a very delicate, precarious thing.

JVU: I have a few questions now about the tourists. How do you feel about the guests that come to Holland year after year for the festival, both as a director and a resident?

KV: Well they're real important. They, in essence, pay for it. They are the financial stability of the festival. If they stop coming, if they get sick of it, we're in big trouble. But we were also trying to create events that would appeal, more spontaneous things that would appeal to younger families. The tourists are totally taken with the festival. They come in here, and that's when we should really feel proud, because they can't believe that we all have the opportunity to live in this nice, clean little town. I mean I've stood by tourists who watch the kids go up the street, and go, 'Where do you get these beautiful children?' You know. They might be coming from bigger cities, when they see a young person walk at them, they think they're going to get mugged, I don't know. But people generally leave here thinking that we're living in just short of heaven. Because it brings out the best in everybody. I mean, a lot of people I worked with at the festival would be real crabby coming on to it, but when that week happens, you know everybody shows their best side--their best faces, their biggest smiles.

JVU: What kind of experience do you think that those tourists take away from here?

KV: I think that they see this town as like almost story book.

JVU: What about on a cultural level? Do you think they take away an authentic Dutch experience from Tulip Time?

KV: It sort of depends on what they did when they were here, because there are more things to do than they have occasion to do, then they have time to do. I think if they've seen our Dutch dancers, yes. It's a precarious thing too. I think the attractions like Dutch Village and Wooden Shoe Factory, and the Windmill, I think they've all made a real attempt to be authentic. I mean I think that they try and hold to that, and they're family businesses so the kids hang onto it too, and I think that's real important. Although you do find Delft that's made in Japan in Holland during Tulip Time.

JVU: Can you describe to me some of the sentiments that some of the tourists have expressed to you in the past? Or even people from here in Holland.

KV: Well, you know the people in Holland love to whine about Tulip Time. It kind of gets in their way, but I don't think they really mean it. You can . . . what I've discovered since I've left there, is you can go about life and not have it interrupt you at all. The tourists . . . that's all that comes to my mind, Jason, is what I've already said--they come in here and they see this clean community . . . I don't just mean clean physically, I mean that they feel like it's a safe, clean, they see a lot of community spirit, they see beautiful children, they see talented young people, they see big bands, and they think it's like a Dutch version of Prairie Home Companion, Lake Wobegone or something.

It is amazing, because the people in town really do stretch out that extra hand almost inevitably. I don't think during that eight years I ever heard a complaint about someone who had a local staff or volunteer person be rude to them. I never heard that. Everybody likes to be a hero, they like to

know the directions to get to the church or the directions to get to the high school, you know, it makes us feel good.

JVU: Okay. What do you see as a major problem with Tulip Time? If any.

KV: Well, I'm not sure they're problems. We've already talked about the challenges. The challenges are financial; they're marketing and competition, because other people would like to have what we have. They're the ethnic diversity. They're keeping the interest of the young people, because without the young people's interest, we can't do this festival. They're political. I think that . . . I don't like politics, and I think that sometimes it gets to be a little political football. I don't think that's healthy for it. Those are the major challenges.

JVU: Well, that was my last question. It went from major problems to challenges as my last question, so I guess that's it. I had one other question for you, which you can feel free to answer or not, you've probably been asked it in the past. You worked for both the Tulip Time Board and the . . .

KV: Convention and Visitor's Bureau, right.

JVU: There was some tension there between the two groups. I guess what I don't understand is, those two groups would want the same things you would think. Can you explain what the tension was there?

KV: I'm sure it was political. I'm sure it was . . . they did want the same things. I thought it was a beautiful marriage. I really thought it made a lot of sense. I like efficiency, and there was a lot of cost efficiency and there was a lot of philosophical efficiencies in the two groups being together. It's too bad when politics has to get in the way of that, and that's only my interpretation, I have no evidence of that, but I really think it's a shame; I think it's sad.

JVU: So was the town upset that two parties that basically wanted the same thing ended up leading . . .

KV: I don't know, it split after I did, so . . . so I don't have

the inside track on that. If you find out an answer, I would love to know. Has anybody given you . . . are you asking that to people?

JVU: I asked Jaap about it, he didn't know what to say about it either, and he's the only other person I've asked.

KV: Other people will say, 'Oh it's good. They both need to focus on their own thing and stuff,'

but that's a pretty naive answer because I understand the gut of both those organizations. Not because I'm smarter, because I worked with it every day.

JVU: Was it conflicting philosophies?

KV: No, I think it was power. Personalities, and politics, and power.

JVU: Okay. Well, on a happier note maybe . . . If you could sum up Tulip Time and what it stands for in your own words, that would be great.

KV: I think I've said it in so many little ways it's kind of hard to make it now concise. I think that the festival is indeed a celebration of our quality of life in Holland. It is a time for us to reassess how we live and who we live with, and what we do for each other. I said before, Tulip Time sort of personifies the world the way we hope it would be; where people don't steal, where people do make the extra effort, go the extra mile to help each other out. I know that sounds sappy, but that's what I saw during the festival. People sharing, people helping each other, people at their best, and I think the festival's got to come along and keep up with the times and the cultural diversities, and what people are interested in from . . . in entertainment aspect. But I just hope that somehow, some wise fathers and mothers someplace can preserve the spirit of the festival which is about people--and it doesn't make any difference if it's Dutch people or hispanic people, or Asian people. [But] this is our town, this is where we came from, and this how we live together. It's also good business. Very good business. Very good economic impact for this town and it's causes.

JVU: Actually, one more question came to mind while you were speaking just then if you have time still.

KV: Sure.

JVU: You said you lived here when you were younger and then left for twenty-five years, and came back to run the festival. Did you attend the festival when you were living here as a child?

KV: Yes. The festival is one of the reasons we made the decision to move back. We came up here to visit during one festival, and my husband and I who had two young children at the time observed exactly what I'm saying; this is a great place for kids to grow up. We want our kids to have what we had when we were kids, and it all kind of comes together at a Tulip Time parade, where you believe that this is a good place to live and a good place to raise kids. So yeah, it's really kind of ironic. I almost forgot about that, Jason. But it was during the Tulip Time festival . . . we hadn't been here for years. We lived in Louisville, Kentucky. We took our kids to the Derby parade which is much bigger and more extravagant than what we do here. [And] we'd always tell our kids, 'You should see a Tulip Time parade.' So we finally took them up to see a Tulip Time parade, and during that visit, we decided to move back. So that's how personal it is to me.

JVU: Were there any things that you remembered from your childhood attending festivals, that when you came back to run it, you . . .

KV: Those poignant moments when I saw my own daughter out there Dutch dancing, because I had been a Dutch dancer when I was a kid, and I know that you don't have that experience in New York or California, or Florida, and the first time I went down to see her Dutch dancing, I cried. Because I knew that she was having this wonderful comradery, and I knew that she was having this wonderful time representing her town, and she went in the exhibition group and traveled around the country a little bit with the Dutch dance group. I know that that's a one of a kind experience. That's not something you get if you live in Toledo,

or SanFrancisco, or anyplace. It's unique to here, and the comradery is wonderful.

JVU: So when you came back to run the program, obviously you kept all that in mind, and tried to run it accordingly.

KV: Yeah, although like I said, the city fathers really, and the hospitality of the town is what made the festival. You know the contribution during my time there, was simply modernizing it. Not the outside, the inside; the marketing, the sales, the budget, the corporate sponsorships, the event planning--keep it solid, keep it growing.

JVU: Were there any lessons that the festival learned historically, that when you took office, and began creating this marketing machine that keeps the festival running year after year . . . were there any lessons historically that you had learned from . . .

KV: Oh I think the volunteer thing. I think that whole sense of what we talked about earlier, instead of just hiring people to be just people on the block, that that came from what I learned about the history of the festival. That that volunteer spirit and hospitality is ultimately what will make the festival live or die. So that was big, I mean you know, when I came there, bleacher patrol people . . . we took kids off the street and we paid them four, twenty-five and hour, and that's a lot different than what's going on there now. And that is a historical lesson learned by what I believe were the beginnings. The volunteer spirit. Doing it because you love it.

-End of Interview-